AFRICA AND THE EFFECT OF WORLD WAR II

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ABSTRACT

The Second World War brought into focus the illegality of colonialism in Africa. It is true that most African nations became related after the war in the attempt to regain their lost sovereignty. The effect of the Second World War on Africa situation especially in the area of self-government and self-determination was very vital. It contributed more to a new political climate, the rise of nationalism and the waging of independence campaigns in various colonies as well as the new domestic priorities in the post-war period for colonial rulers. The war however saw the rise and demand for hurriedness in the process of administrative government. By the end of the Second World War, Africa has been well-equipped for the task of nation building. A quite number of African leaders played vital roles in the struggle of political independence in the 1950s. Lots of African countries gained their independence later either through decolonisation or liberation.

Keywords: Second World War, Colonialism, Nationalist Movements, Political Liberation, Self-determination and Self-government.

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to examine how the aftermath of the Second World War influenced or inspired the spirit of self-government and self-determination among African states. It can also be interpreted as the contributions of the Second World War towards Africa's decolonisation and political liberation. The effects of the Second World War on African states cannot be overlooked or discarded because it was crucial for their political liberation.

However, it is important to note that it will not be efficient to examine the effect of an event that has not been explained, that is, in order to give an efficient analysis, it is important for me to briefly discuss what happened before the Second World War.

By the early 1900s European countries had succeeded in establishing their control in Africa. In some cases like the Igbo people of Nigeria, colonial rule was achieved in 1910 shortly before the First World War in 1914. Colonial rule in Africa can be studied in two periods, divided by the First and Second World Wars. Africa's involvement in these two wars helped fuel the struggle for independence from colonial rule. This was partly because participation of Africans in these wars exposed them to ideas of self-determination and independent rule.

The First World War changed things in Europe and Africa. It destroyed the economy of European countries. To rebuild their economies they turned to Africa's mineral and agricultural wealth. Europe's growing interest in Africa's minerals led to her expansion into the interior. The great depression that followed worsened the already failing economies of Europe. The mining of mineral wealth from Africa required the reorganization of colonial rule, which meant that the autonomy chiefs and kings in Africa had maintained over the years would be increasingly dissolved to make room for a more 'progressive' form of government.

The result of these changes included taking land from African people and giving it to the growing number of Europeans in the colonies. The other changes were the introduction of taxes like the hut tax and poll tax that forced Africans to work for European settlers.

Africans were forced to work for Europeans in order to pay these taxes. This was because the new taxes had to be paid in cash and not as cattle or crops as was the practice before. Exploitation of African labourers by European employers added to the growing resentment among the local people.

Colonial governments began to introduce agricultural reforms aimed at improving the revenues collected from African farmers. African societies were deeply affected by these changes because most of them were still dependent on agriculture for survival. Africans were now forced to sell their crops to colonial markets at lower prices that would in turn sell these crops to an international market at a much higher price. Colonies made a lot of profit in this way. Many African farmers and rulers blamed the colonial government for decreasing profits and as a result, people began to demand an end to colonial rule.

Resistance movements began to rise in Africa. In colonies with a growing number of settlers, the demand for more land and labour increased tensions between colonial authorities and the white communities that had settled in the colonies. More land was taken from African people and given to Europeans for settlement. In response to these developments, some chiefs organised rebellions against colonial authorities.

One of the chiefs who organised an armed rebellion against British colonial authority was Zulu Chief Bambatha. He was not happy with the loss of land his people suffered and the poll tax of one pound that they were forced to pay. His demand was that his people's land be returned and the poll tax lifted. The armed rebellion was finally crushed after lasting out a year. Chief Bambatha together with his 3000 followers was killed. There were similar revolts in Eastern Africa, South West Africa, and Zimbabwe. Like the Bambatha rebellions they were all crushed.

In East Africa there was the Maji Maji revolt organised by Kinjigitile Ngwale in 1905. The revolt was against forced labour and tax policies forced upon the people by the German government, which was implementing a cotton scheme to increase her exports. To

implement their scheme the Germans forced Africans to plant cotton instead of their traditional staple crops. And the Maji Maji revolted.

Another response to colonial transformation was the formation of political parties. These were formed by the small educated group of Africans mainly residing in developing colonial towns. These Africans were educated at missionary schools. At first, these parties did not seek to create a mass following, but to lobby their respective colonial governments to recognise the civil rights of Africans and protect and recognize the land rights of Africans in rural areas.

The formation of political parties in this period reflected changes in African nationalism. It was now increasingly being influenced by western education and Christianity. This created a new educated social group in Africa, which was excluded from participating in colonial rule because they were Africans. Their aspirations were equality between Europeans and Africans and later they began to demand self-rule. From the beginning they worked closely with chiefs because they shared the same demands. But because colonial rule adopted chiefs into the administration of African people, the growing number of chiefs who were co-operating with colonial government strained the relationship between the new elite leaders and the chiefs.

Furthermore, western educated leaders feared that because chiefs represent different ethnic groups, they would undermine the unity of African nationalism by causing ethnic rivalries in the colonies. Therefore they began to undermine chiefs in an attempt to overcome ethnic differences in the colonies.

New parties, like the SANNC (South African National Natives Congress) were largely modelled on the American civil rights movement with the political independence cause playing a secondary role. Civil rights movements are mainly concerned with improving the human rights of followers. The aim was not to replace the form of government. The major political demand prior to the Second World War was for reforms and a more inclusive

colonial government. These parties were Pan African in character. They did not recognise colonial borders. For example, in West Africa there was the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) uniting political leaders in West African British Colonies.

IMPACT OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR ON THE SPIRIT OF SELF-GOVERNMENT AND SELF-DETERMINATION IN AFRICA

The earlier stated Africa situation before the Second World War which explained that there have been series of movements and resistance to the colonial policies and rule especially after the First World War. The effect of the Second World War on Africa situation especially in the area of self-government and self-determination was very vital. It contributed more to a new political climate, the rise of nationalism and the waging of independence campaigns in various colonies as well as the new domestic priorities in the post-war period for colonial rulers.

Moreover, the Second World War facilitated Africa's political liberation partly by undermining Europe's capacity to hold on to its empires. Britain was exhausted and almost impoverished by the time war ended. France had been humiliated by Germany. Related to this exhaustion and impoverishment of Western Europe following its own fratricidal war was the destruction of the myth of European invincibility in the eyes of the colonized peoples. Suddenly somebody noticed in Bombay that the Emperor's clothes of modern technology were not clothes at all—the British Raj was naked! And when the Indians started pointing fingers and exposing the nakedness of their Emperor, other people elsewhere began to do the same. That is one reason why the precedent set by India in challenging British rule became an important inspiration to many African nationalists.

Also, the Second World War broadened the general social and political horizons not only of ex-servicemen who had served in the war, but of many Africans who had remained behind. The idea of listening to the radio for overseas news concerning the war gathered momentum during the war. Individual Africans in a township were, in terms of conversations

among themselves, identified as being either pro-British or pro-German.

It was clear that the grown-ups regarded the contending forces in Europe partly as soccer team's writ large, and the Africans were placing their bets on the two European powers at war with each other.

The Second World War also influenced the spirit of self-government and self-determination because at the end of it, the seat of world power was no longer Western Europe but had divided itself between Washington and Moscow. The two superpowers both had a tradition of anti-imperialism in at least some sense, though both superpowers were also guilty of other forms of imperialism. What is clear is that the rise of the Soviet Union and the pre-eminence of the United States after the Second World War created two pressures on European powers to make concessions to African nationalists struggling for independence.

The West's fear of the Soviet Union sometimes retarded the process of liberation, but in the end facilitated that process, convincing Westerners that it was a good idea to give independence to moderate Africans while there was still time, and thus avert the threat of radicalizing Africans still further and driving them into the hands of the Soviet Union. For millions of Africans all over the continent the Second World War was an important internationalizing experience. By the end of it many Africans were ready to agitate for freedom and independence.

Furthermore, the Second World War also influenced the spirit of self-government and self-determination in Africa following the emergence of Pan-Africanism at the end of the war. This was a major factor in the rise of nationalist movements which came into fort under the influence of W.E.B Dubois. Congresses were held one in Paris and the most notable was held in Manchester in 1945. It was attended by some African leaders from different part of the continent like Kenyatta and Julius Nyenrere of Tanzania. This congress made bold declaration against colonialism and urged those who attended to go to their respective countries and organise positive actions, innate the people and make positive play for the

development of their countries.

The Second World War also resulted to series of nationalist movements in Africa which influenced the spirit of self-government and self-determination in Africa. Europeans had been portrayed as super adult and virtually superhuman. The war in turn humanized white men in the eyes of their African comrades as they fought together in the Horn of Africa, North Africa, Malaya and elsewhere. To witness a white man scared to death under fire was itself a revelation to many Africans, who had previously seen white men only in their arrogant commanding postures as a colonial élite.

So, while the image of the African was humanized by being pulled up from equation with devils, monkeys and children, the image of the white man was humanized by being pulled down from equation with supermen, angels, and the gods themselves. Since the World War was also fought to defend freedom, hence, Africans capitalised on that to promote nationalist campaign against foreign or colonial rule.

RESPONSES OF COLONIAL GOVERNMENTS TO THE VARIOUS INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENTS IN AFRICA

The impact of the Second World War on the spirit of self-government and self-determination in Africa was numerous and effective that it made many colonial governments to respond to the struggle. Colonial governments became increasingly aware that colonial rule could not be maintained forever. They were under pressure to justify why they were keeping African societies under their rule despite the United Nations declaration that all people have the right to self-determination. People in Africa had the right to be free and independent from colonial rule and colonial governments had the responsibility to co-operate.

They began to introduce significant reforms to prepare Africans for self-government. At the same time this war also marked increasing control of Africans by colonial

governments. The steps for self-government were often just a pretext for more centralized colonial authority. These 'preparations' meant that the government would increase control over chiefs and centralise power in the hands of colonial governors who would introduce sweeping changes, especially in the field of agriculture without consideration of the wishes of African people. This approach led to the black people and African political parties becoming increasingly radical. After the war, most of these demanded independence from colonial rule.

Colonial governments responded by saying Africans were being prepared for future self-government. But many of them were not ready to hand over rule to African people. Most European governments thought that colonial rule would end much later. In colonies like Angola, Mozambique, Algeria, and Kenya African people were forced to fight wars to win their independence.

Moreover, as part of the steps toward African self-governance, colonial governments began to invest in education and schools in the colonies. This resulted in a growing number of young educated black people whose social and political mobility was restricted by colonial rule. These growing numbers of educated elites were frustrated with the limited prospects they held under the colonial state. They were increasingly driven to fight for an end to colonial rule. Self-rule became the slogan. Nkwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, the former Gold Coast, changed that slogan to *'independence now'*. He captured the aspiration for self rule with his popular slogan: *"seek ye first the political kingdom, and the rest shall follow"*. What he meant was that independence from colonial rule was the only way to guarantee a better life for all Ghanaians.

For example, in response to these growing demands for self-rule, the British colonial government introduced the Burns constitution in 1946. The Burns constitution, based on the Westminster model, incorporated the elites, chiefs and kings of Ghana into the colonial government. The majority of the people, many of them blue-collar workers were excluded

from government. Though rejected by Kwame Nkrumah's party, the Burns constitution proved an important step towards independent Ghana's constitution.

CONCLUSION

The Second World War brought into focus the illegality of colonialism. It is true that most Africa nations became related after the wave in the attempt to regain the lost sovereignty. The war however saw the rise and demand for hurriedness in the process of administrative government. By the end of the Second World War, Africa has been well-equipped for the task of nation building. A quite number of them played vital role in the struggle of political independence in the 1950s. Lots of African countries gained their independence later either through decolonisation or liberation.

However, it was essential in this study to examine the events preceding the Second World War, the effect of the Second World War on the spirit of self-government and self-determination in Africa, the response of colonial governments to the agitations and independence movements in order to write a detailed and efficient essay.

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